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2008 Home Demonstration Gardens

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Abstract
The 2008 Home Demonstration Gardens featured heirloom versus hybrid tomatoes, personal or small watermelons, culinary herbs, cut/dried flowers, and green flowers. However, the unusually late and wet spring in most of the state delayed the tomatoes and watermelon so much that many field day attendees were not able to sample the fruit. Instead, attendees were asked to complete a brief questionnaire about their home gardening practices.

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Introduction

The 2008 Home Demonstration Gardens featured heirloom versus hybrid tomatoes, personal or small watermelons, culinary herbs, cut/dried flowers, and green flowers. However, the unusually late and wet spring in most of the state delayed the tomatoes and watermelon so much that many field day attendees were not able to sample the fruit. Instead, attendees were asked to complete a brief questionnaire about their home gardening practices.

Materials and Methods

Data were collected from attendees at the eight field days across the state. Attendees were asked eight close-ended questions and three open-ended questions at the completion of each field day. Two hundred forty-five people completed surveys (28 percent response rate). Approximately 874 people attended the 2008 Home Demonstration Garden Field Days.

Results and Discussion

The average Home Demonstration Garden Field Day participant traveled 28.6 miles to attend the field day. When asked how long they spent gardening each week 32 percent said they spent 2 to 4 hours/week and 21 percent spent 5 to 7 hours/week. The majority of respondents found information about gardening (146 responses) from gardening books, magazines, or newspapers and through friends/family. Seventy-two respondents found information from all the choices (through friends/family, from the Internet, gardening books/magazines/newspapers, Master Gardener/Extension programs, and television).

When asked what they compost, the majority chose leaves and grass clippings (60 percent and 59 percent, respectively). Forty-two percent also composted kitchen scraps, and 24 percent of respondents didn't compost. Those that did compost listed other items they composted, such as newspaper and shredded paper, sawdust, weeds, animal manure, sticks and twigs, woodchips, and ashes.

The majority of respondents (58 percent) indicated that they recycled plastic such as containers and milk jugs for use in the garden. Fifty-eight percent also reported reusing potting soil, and 52 percent reported reusing paper and cardboard in the garden. Respondents also reported reusing/recycling straw, baling twine, wire, cans, boards, sticks for staking, and nylon hose for use in the garden.

Seventy-three percent of participants agreed or strongly agreed that they try to reduce the use of pesticides/herbicides in their garden each year (Table 1). Fewer participants agreed or strongly agreed that they try to reduce the use of fertilizers or water in the garden each year (54 and 55 percent, respectively).

The results from the three open-ended questions were coded and summarized. A majority of respondents reported that mulching made their garden "green" or "sustainable." They used grass clippings, leaves, straw, switchgrass, woodchips, cardboard, old carpet, newspaper, and shredded paper for mulch. Respondents also reported that compost, manure, and rain barrels also made their gardens sustainable.

When asked what concerns they had about "going green," respondents stated that pests, insects, diseases, and weeds were their main

concerns. Two people mentioned crop yields as a concern about going green.

The final open-ended question asked the respondents what gardening practices they would be interested in learning. The responses are summarized as follows:

- Fruit production of grapes and raspberries
- Pruning fruit trees
- Saving space in the vegetable garden
- High tunnel production
- How to grow produce for farmers market
- Crop rotation
- Companion planting
- Vegetables
- Organic production
- Growing and using herbs
- Natural pesticides
- Composting and mulching
- Conserving water
- Disease prevention
- Integrating flowers into vegetable garden
- Food preservation (canning, freezing, etc.)
- Seed saving

The survey indicates that home gardeners are practicing a variety of "green" or sustainable methods in their gardens. People are also aware of many practices and are interested in learning more about gardening.

Table 1. Percentage of respondents from 2008 Home Demonstration Garden Field Days to Likert Scale questions on the reduction of pesticides or herbicides, fertilizers, and water use in the garden each year (n = 245).

	Reduce pest/herb	Reduce fertilizers	Use less water
Strongly agree	31	18	11
Agree	42	36	44
Neutral	22	33	30
Disagree	4	10	10
Strongly disagree	.8	.8	1
No response	.2	2.2	3